

## National Prevention Strategies: How Can the UN Peacebuilding Commission Provide Support?

*Summary Note*

July 25, 2024

Over the past two years, interest in and attention to national prevention strategies has gained momentum. Countries from different regions and income levels have presented their national prevention strategies and efforts at the Peacebuilding Commission (the Commission hereafter). While respecting the principle of national ownership and the voluntary nature of presenting at the Commission, these meetings have demonstrated the universality of prevention. In the second draft revision of the Pact for the Future, Member States recognise the Commission's important role in supporting national prevention strategies and efforts including through facilitating exchanges of good practices and mobilising political and financial support.<sup>1</sup> As Member States' interest in making use of the platform offered by the Commission to share their priorities and experiences increases, questions arise as to how the Commission can most effectively support such strategies.

In the context of the upcoming Summit of the Future and the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, this roundtable provided a space for Member States to discuss opportunities and challenges for the Commission to facilitate the exchange of good practices, coordinate support, and mobilise funding for national prevention strategies.

The following are key themes raised during the discussion:

- **The Commission can offer support to Member States to strengthen and implement their national prevention strategies within its current mandate and working methods.**

Should Member States decide to use the Commission to present and discuss their national prevention strategies, there is space to do so within the current mandate. The existing working methods of the Commission provide opportunities for Member States to seek support to strengthen and implement such strategies. For example, the current working methods of the Commission suggest that the work plan includes specific focused meetings in which diverse countries can share their national peacebuilding plans.<sup>2</sup> The 2023 annual report suggests that the Commission started considering support for the preparation of national strategies for conflict prevention and their implementation both in line with national ownership.<sup>3</sup> This topic was also discussed during the last annual meeting of the Commission with the African Union (AU)'s Peace and Security Council (PSC).<sup>4</sup> This signals that the Commission can more actively integrate the focus on national prevention strategies in their work.

The Commission could provide further targeted support to those Member States seeking it. Previous discussions within this series effectively unpacked the Commission's support to Liberia and Burkina

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<sup>1</sup> See Action 18 (e) and Action 45 of the Pact for the Future: Rev. 2. Accessible at: <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future-revisions>

<sup>2</sup> See the current working methods in the Annex of the Annual Report here: [A/78/765-S/2024/153](https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future-revisions)

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its seventeenth session: [A/78/765-S/2024/153](https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future-revisions)

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its seventeenth session: [A/78/765-S/2024/153](https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future-revisions).

Faso in their transition processes and developing peacebuilding strategies. Similar targeted assistance could be provided to Member States wishing to consider the Commission's support in developing their prevention strategies. However, the Commission's membership should reflect on whether the Commission has enough expertise to provide targeted advice to Member States.

- **The Commission can provide benefits for exchanges on lessons learned on the development and implementation of national prevention strategies for Member States.**

When the Commission's Member States do not have expertise on topics that require attention, its convening role could be utilised to bring in experts to support Member States in developing and implementing national prevention strategies. The Commission has provided effective support to Timor-Leste to engage with the broader UN System, regional organisations, and international financial institutions (IFIs) to assist the country's post-conflict reconstruction and development efforts. The discussions in the Commission also contributed to fostering collective responsibility and participation of various actors in peacebuilding activities in Timor-Leste, strengthening public support, and legitimacy of the peacebuilding process. The discussion of the Commission also helped to inform certain member states' decision to invest in [the UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme on building national capacities for conflict prevention](#). Going forward, the Commission's Secretariat<sup>5</sup> will need to work in close coordination with Member States to tailor the conversation and participation at meetings to respond to Member States' goals and priorities, as every government will likely not only have different strategies but also different expectations from peacebuilding stakeholders.

It was noted that by offering a platform for exchanges on national prevention strategies to Member States, the Commission is helping to normalise and destigmatise prevention and driving political support for such strategies while affirming national ownership of these processes. Furthermore, discussions in the Commission are helping to illuminate the diversity of national prevention strategies based on the types of violence they address (e.g., armed conflict, violent extremism) and how they are designed (e.g., sectoral strategy, peacebuilding architecture, overarching strategy, etc.). Some participants suggested that country-focused discussions might be more useful than thematic sessions at the Commission. It was pointed out that since the value of the thematic sessions was questioned in the early days of the Commission, the past few years' discussions have been a combination of country and thematic sessions. Some mentioned that meetings in which country experiences are shared can provide information on common factors of effective national prevention strategies.

Overall, there is no shared understanding of what is a good national prevention strategy which presents some challenges. This includes not knowing what 'good' practices which are seen to make exchanges less valuable, being unable to compare strategies to enhance learning among countries, and the risk of presentations becoming a peace-washing exercise. Reaching a shared understanding of what national prevention strategies entail was underlined as crucial for Member States, who emphasised that the label of such strategies is not important as long the strategy includes key principles to make them effective in preventing violence. Participants noted the value of having principles to guide presentations and discussions at the Commission. In this vein, there was general agreement among participants on the value of think tanks and civil society's offering continued support to Member States to guide the development of such principles and elaborate national prevention strategies. If requested through the

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<sup>5</sup> The Commission's Secretariat is also known as the Commission support branch, the Peacebuilding Support Office.

Pact for the Future, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) could also work on such principles/guidelines.

Having a shared understanding of national prevention strategies could help Member States' experts have better conversations, inform who should be present at meetings, and determine specific support that can be provided by the UN and other stakeholders based on their expertise and capacity. Specifically, it was suggested that by having clarity at the outset of the goal or motivation of Member States presenting national prevention strategies at the Commission (e.g., exchanging good practices, seeking political and/or financial support), PBSO could work with Member States to develop a tailored invitation list of participants for each discussion to provide the expertise and guidance needed. This includes UN agencies, funds, and programs, IFIs, regional organisations, and the private sector, among others. The question arises, however, about whether the Commission has the capacity to respond to the demand for hosting discussions on national prevention strategies and follow up with concrete action points, which remains unclear and requires further discussion. Therefore, it is important for Member States willing to present their national prevention strategies to the Commission to coordinate with the Chair to allow for the consolidation of interests and objective-setting for the meetings.

On a cautionary note, civil society partners noted that focusing on national ownership may limit opportunities to include diverse stakeholders in the Commission's meetings and encouraged the Commission to continue ensuring the participation of independent civil society in such meetings.

- **Other UN intergovernmental bodies can complement the Commission's support to Member States to strengthen and implement national prevention strategies.**

Prevention work is being done in and outside of the Commission. Intergovernmental bodies, such as the General Assembly and the Security Council, and UN agencies, funds, and programs (AFPs) can also support national prevention strategies based on their respective mandates. The Commission, for example, is not considered an adequate platform to support policy development on national prevention strategies, as the Commission does not make global policy and is not the most representative body.<sup>6</sup> The suggestion was made that the UN General Assembly could organise a High-Level Meeting, similar to the 2022 High-Level Meeting on Financing for Peacebuilding,<sup>7</sup> contributing to a resolution that agrees on a definition for national prevention strategies and identifies how different actors within the UN system could support the development and implementation of such strategies. In the previous roundtable series, the suggestion was also brought up to organise annual meetings of the General Assembly to provide a space for countries to present their national prevention strategies in a forum that is more representative than the Commission. However, it was recommended that based on the key principle of national ownership and the voluntary nature of national prevention strategies, the presentation of national prevention strategies be done at the Commission at Member States' request.

The Commission can also utilise its advisory role to the Security Council to advance the broader UN System's support for national prevention strategies. As discussions on prevention become more normalised, the Commission can increasingly leverage its advisory role to incorporate

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<sup>6</sup> The Commission's membership is composed of 31 Member States. Check the current membership here:

<https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/commission/membership>

<sup>7</sup> Check all details about the meeting here: <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/high-level-meeting-general-assembly-financing-peacebuilding>

recommendations and flag root causes of violence and opportunities for prevention on the Council's thematic and country-specific work.

Finally, Member States discussed how the Commission could provide a space to strengthen coordination among the UN system to support national prevention strategies, and potentially to address exogenous shocks. A participant mentioned that the Peacebuilding Contact Group has capacities to coordinate various UN entities operating at the country level in support of Member States' efforts to develop national prevention strategies. An invitation was extended to the Peacebuilding Contact Group to have a dedicated discussion on how the UN System could support Member States and their national prevention strategies based on its expertise and diverse mandates.

- **National prevention strategies need financing for their effective implementation, and the Commission's convening capacity may be able to provide some support.**

Adequate financing is crucial for effective implementation of national prevention strategies. The Commission does not have its own funding mechanism. Countries engaging with the Commission on the development or implementation of national peacebuilding and prevention strategies could however be provided with support for such efforts through the Peacebuilding Fund provided they meet the relevant eligibility criteria. Further, its engagement with international financial institutions (IFIs) could offer further opportunities to mobilise financial resources for developing, strengthening, and implementing national prevention strategies. Among others, when a Member State presents its national prevention strategy at or to the Commission, it can signal to IFIs that such a country is open to discussing prevention. Given the sensitivity around prevention, such a signal facilitates engagement. Additionally, it shows that the country is already undertaking prevention efforts, which is a prerequisite to access some funding. Finally, a country could use the Commission to make the case for the need to receive financial support even in upstream contexts, by presenting increasing risks. Concerns were raised that on many occasions conflicts exist between donor and recipient's priorities, and financial support often ends up following donor's priorities at the expense of national priorities. At the same time, IFIs often express the concern that they do not like to be thought of as "an ATM." Given the broad interest and the lack of time to discuss this fully during the roundtable, roundtable participants suggested a follow-up session within this series to focus explicitly on IFI engagement with the Commission.

**Based on these key themes raised in the discussion, the following suggestions are offered:**

- Ahead of each meeting, Member States presenting national prevention strategies could share their priorities and expectations with the Commission's Secretariat regarding how the Commission can support them (e.g., political and/or financial support, good practices exchange) so the Secretariat invites relevant stakeholders to each discussion.
- Member States of the Commission could discuss options within its mandate and working methods to support national prevention strategies with support from think tanks and civil society.
- The Commission's Secretariat could continue working closely with IFIs to ensure their strategic engagement/participation in Commission meetings around national prevention strategies. Continuing the discussions on this issue would help understand what Member States need from IFIs, how IFIs envision such engagement and support, and how the Commission can assist.

- The Peacebuilding Contact Group could further explore how the UN System and the Commission can strengthen their support to Member States interested in developing national prevention strategies. These discussions could be supported by think tanks and civil society.
- The Commission should ensure that local civil society is present during the Commission's meetings focused on national prevention strategies.
- The Commission should assess how often and through what modalities it can accommodate requests for support to develop and implement national prevention strategies. This could be linked to an ongoing exploration of results through country-specific configurations vs. more flexible, multi-country, or regional meetings as well as an effort to strengthen follow-up and action. In conjunction with this, the Commission should develop a common understanding of how its space can be effectively utilised for learning and exchange.
- The Commission could utilise its advisory role to the Security Council to highlight the prevention mechanisms available and risks that need to be addressed in its thematic and country-focused work for the Council's members.